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USDA PROPOSES TO AMEND NATIONAL POULTRY IMPROVEMENT PLAN

WASHINGTON, May 27, 2008--The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is proposing to amend sampling and testing procedures for participants in the voluntary national poultry improvement plan (NPIP). The proposed changes would keep the provisions of the plan current with advancements in the poultry industry.

Specifically, APHIS is proposing to increase the number of approved tests for avian influenza (AI) used in breeding and commercial poultry from two to four. The two additional tests can provide highly specific results quickly, making them extremely useful as screening tests for AI and as part of an initial state response and containment plan in the event of an outbreak. Any positive test results would continue to be confirmed by federal reference laboratories and an official determination of a flock as positive for the H5 or H7 subtypes of AI would be made only by APHIS' National Veterinary Services Laboratories.

In addition, APHIS is proposing to increase the frequency of required AI tests to 90-day intervals instead of 180-day intervals. This increase in testing will enhance U.S. flock health and help to maintain the U.S. classification of "avian influenza clean" for chickens and turkeys. APHIS is also proposing to expand the U.S. avian influenza clean classification to include other breeding flocks, such as ostrich and emu.

APHIS is proposing to add more detailed requirements for authorized laboratories. The authorized laboratory minimum requirements would include check-test proficiency, trained technicians, laboratory protocol, annual state site visit, service review every three years, reporting criteria and verification.

APHIS is proposing to expand the information contained in the audits of poultry slaughter plants and is proposing changes in surveillance sampling at commercial meat-type turkey slaughter plants.   Also being proposed is the requirement to have a designated state contact representative to facilitate communication between the state and APHIS.

NPIP is a cooperative network of federal, state and industry partners that work together to prevent and control poultry disease. NPIP identifies organizations and entities that meet specific disease control standards, providing a mechanism to identify poultry that has tested clean of certain diseases or that has been produced under disease-prevention conditions.

Notice of this action is scheduled for publication in the May 28 *Federal Register*.

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Consideration will be given to comments received on or before July 28. Send an original and two copies of postal mail or commercial delivery comments to Docket No. APHIS-2007-0042, Regulatory Analysis and Development, PPD, APHIS, Station 3A-03.8, 4700 River Road, Unit 118, Riverdale, MD 20737-1238. If you wish to submit a comment using the Internet go to the Federal eRulemaking portal at http://www.regulations.gov/fdmspublic/component/main?main=DocketDetail&d=APHIS-2007-0042. Click on "Add Comments" to view public comments and related materials available electronically.

Comments are posted on the Regulations.gov Web site and also can be viewed at USDA, Room 1141, South Building, 14th St. and Independence Ave., S.W., Washington, D.C., between 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. To facilitate entry into the comment reading room, please call (202) 690-2817.

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